

## A History of Missouri's Floral Emblem By Erika Woehlk, Visual Materials Archivist

On March 16, 1923, Gov. Arthur M. Hyde signed a bill making the hawthorn blossom the official Missouri state floral emblem. Yet for decades prior, Missourians struggled to nominate and approve a state flower.

The story begins in 1893 with the Chicago World's Fair, formally the Columbian Exposition. The Fair's organizers asked every state to choose a representative flower for floral displays in the Exposition's Horticulture Building. In a poll run by the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Missouri readers suggested dog fennel, violet, wild rose, crabapple blossom and many more. Out of 9,582 votes, the crabapple blossom won by a wide margin.



Fun fact: the largest book ever made in the United States (as of 1893) was a blank subscription book for *Chaperone Magazine*, a St. Louis publication owned by female entrepreneur Annie Orff. The book weighed 163 pounds and measured over five feet wide. Displayed at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, its front cover was illustrated with Missouri's chosen flower for the Exposition: the crabapple blossom.

This illustration by Brown of the St. Louis Compton Company appeared in *Chaperone Magazine*, Vol. 8 (Sept. 1893-Feb. 1894). It may reflect the book's cover. (Courtesy of St. Louis Mercantile Library)

Following the Exposition, according to one 1901 newspaper report, there was a campaign for Missouri schoolchildren to select a state floral emblem. They came up with the goldenrod. The yellow flower was widely used in early 20th century wedding decorations, so it is not as odd a choice as one might think. It was also not erroneously associated with allergies as it is today. There was even a parallel campaign urging that the goldenrod be adopted as America's *national* floral emblem.

Many publications advertised this word-of-mouth, unofficial state flower as official in the following years, including *Tiemann's Symbolical Reference Chart* used in libraries nationwide as a state symbol reference source. In actual fact, the Missouri Legislature had *not* adopted the goldenrod as a floral emblem.



This 1908 postcard identifies the goldenrod as Missouri's state flower. The poem reads, "Over Missouri's sun-kissed plain | There grows the symbol of her reign. | Her sceptre is fair golden rod | It waves o'er rich and verdant sod." (from the Bob Priddy Collection, MS369)

Supporters revived the campaign to adopt the goldenrod in 1915 when an official state flower was to decorate Missouri's Panama-Pacific Exposition train car. The Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis declared it to be the goldenrod, although Secretary of State Cornelius Roach and Shaw's Botanical Garden both correctly stated there was no official state flower.



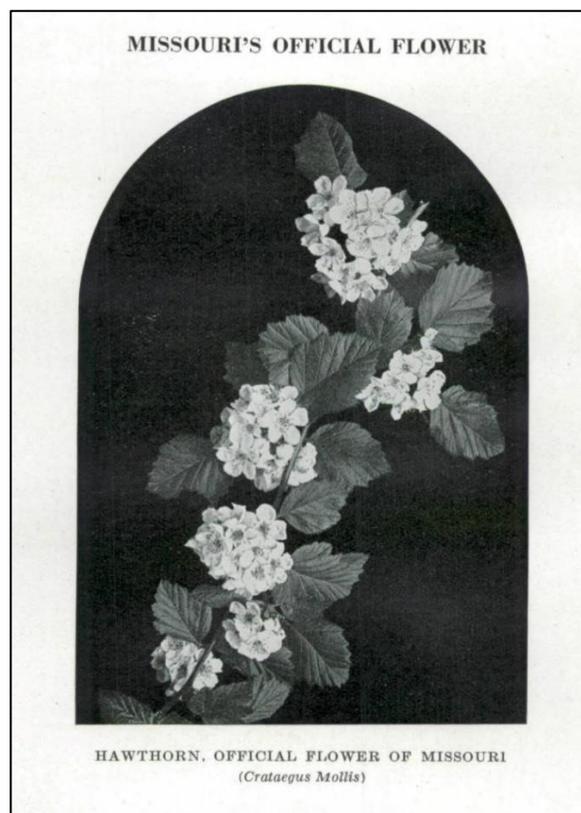
Illustration of the ox-eye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*), from a 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch publication called *Flora Batava, of Afbeelding en beschrijving van Nederlandsche Gewassen*

Harkening back to the Columbian Exposition, the State Historical Society, State Horticultural Society, Daughters of the American Revolution and other organizations joined together to request that the wild crabapple become the official state flower in 1917, though their resolution failed. Two years later, they made another attempt for the crabapple, but Senate Bill 441 died with a vote of 39 to 40. Later that year, the Daughters of the American Revolution switched flower allegiances and lobbied the Legislature to approve the *daisy* as the state flower. That effort, too, failed. The daisy supporters persisted for two more years, however, and Sen. Frank Warner introduced a new bill on their behalf in 1921. Then came the real debate.

An anonymous petition made its way to the General Assembly in February 1921 advocating that the hawthorn, aka the "red haw," become the state's official floral emblem. Floor debate ensued later that month. Daisy supporters pinned daisy flowers to the jackets of the legislators on their side. Hawthorn supporters turned out in numbers as well. The hawthorn spokesperson called the daisy an "alien flower." (Ox-eye daisies are an imported species not native to North America, let alone Missouri.) Neither side could

garner a majority of supporters; the hawthorn bill failed in the House with a vote of 68 to 44, while the daisy bill never even made it out of committee.

The matter came up once more during the 1923 legislative session. Supporters submitted another bill that would designate the hawthorn blossom as Missouri's official state flower. (Actually, there were two bills, but one became the preferred.) This time, the bill was unopposed, passing unanimously in the House with a vote of 130 to zero and in the Senate 25 to one, the lone naysayer being Sen. O.A. Pickett of the Fourth District (Harrison, Livingston, Mercer, Grundy and Putnam Counties). Gov. Hyde signed the bill into law on March 16, 1923. Finally, it was official! After so many pivots, Missouri's state floral emblem was codified into law as the hawthorn blossom.



The 1923-24 *Official Manual of the State of Missouri* was the first edition to identify the hawthorn as the state flower, including this illustration of *Crataegus mollis*, the downy or red hawthorn. (p. 20)

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